

## Chapter 7

### Conference in Millheim Appointed to Buffalo Circuit, Union County PA.

Conference met in Millheim, Centre County, the first Thursday in March, 1862, with a full attendance. Here I preached my first sermon before the conference, from Isaiah 55:6 – and we had a good meeting, though at first I felt a little nervous. At this conference we had an exciting time, occasioned by a brother offering a resolution expressing our “sympathy with, and hearty support of, the government in crushing the wicked rebellion raging in our once united and happy country.” The resolution met with most bitter opposition from a few of the members who refused to entertain it. But when it was left to a vote, whether the conference would entertain the resolution or not, it was decided by a large majority to entertain it. The resolution was written and offered by a Democrat, and it was seconded by a Democrat. But there were a few rebel sympathizers present, one from Baltimore, and flaming speeches were made on both sides. It finally carried by a standing, or rising, vote – and a large majority, each brother’s name being recorded as he voted. But six, if memory serves me right, refused to vote at all – but not being excused from voting by the conference, their names were recorded as against it. The secular papers made a considerable handle of their names and speeches. It occasioned considerable stir in the town, as Millheim at the time was considerably tainted with what were considered rebel sympathizers – and bore the name of Charleston<sup>1</sup> – by many. Indeed on my way to the conference, I saw a board stuck up by the side of the pike with a hand point to that direction, saying so many miles to Charleston.

Millheim had pledged themselves the year before, that if conference would meet there they would convey the members of conference from the different railroad stations to Millheim, and back again – which was quite a distance, being thirty miles from Lewisburg, the nearest railroad station for many of them. I was informed (whether correctly or not I cannot tell) that in consequence of the above resolution, some of the brethren were obliged to get back to the railroad as best they could. I fortunately had my own horse and buggy, and so was independent on that score. At this conference I was appointed as junior preacher on the Buffalo circuit, in the Buffalo Valley, Union County – Rev. S.T. Buck,<sup>2</sup> preacher in charge.

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<sup>1</sup> Since the last conference in March 1861, the Civil War had formally begun April 12, 1861, when the Confederate forces fired on Fort Sumter in the harbor at Charleston SC. The references to Charleston refer to this event.

<sup>2</sup> Solomon T. Buck (1838-1908) was licensed and sent to his first charge in 1860. He had been sent to Buffalo circuit as the junior preacher in 1861, and was now the senior preacher on the two-man circuit. His Evangelical roots ran deep. He was the son of Evangelical preacher Thomas Buck, the brother of Evangelical preacher Henry William Buck Sr., and the father of Bertha L. Buck Swengel, the second wife of Bishop Uriah F. Swengel. He retired from the ministry in 1879.

I returned from conference, and we moved by wagons to New Columbia, Union County, Pa., where we had a pleasant and comfortable home for two years. Here, for once, the parsonage was ready for us to move into – brother Buck having just married that spring, and not yet gone to housekeeping, or he would have claimed the parsonage, being the preacher in charge. But now my old horse, harness and stove were wore out – and I was obliged to get all new, and I had no money. The harness was presented to me, for the old horse I got fifteen dollars and purchased another for seventy dollars. I also bought a new stove, and by the time I was fully started on the new field I found myself nearly four hundred dollars in debt. But this was the good circuit presiding elder S.W. Seibert had promised me, and so I found it. The war continued, times were good, and money was plenty.

Brother Buck and myself labored on this circuit together very pleasantly, and with good success. Shortly after we moved on the charge I was sent for to preach a funeral sermon for a small child some four or five miles out of the valley. When I came to the house of mourning, I found it full of friends and neighbors. After the usual services at the house, they informed me that the sermon was to be preached in the old “White Deer Church,” a union church of the Lutheran (General Council) and Reformed denominations – and as some of them were opposed to others preaching in it, I should not go into the pulpit but should stand on the floor in front of the pulpit if it made no difference to me. I said, “Of course – I will stand on the floor and not desecrate the pulpit by going into it.” So when we entered the church, I very sanctimoniously placed my hat on the pulpit steps and stood on the floor to preach. But they might have saved themselves the trouble of telling me, as I would not have entered the pulpit anyhow – as it was an old fashioned church with a gallery and high pulpit like a goblet in shape. And the congregation being small, no one went into the gallery – and hence I preferred standing on the floor.

Sometime afterwards I attended another funeral in the same church, and was again requested not to enter the pulpit – but stand on the floor. In the fall one of the officials of that church attended one of my meetings and took quite a fancy to me. His little daughter took sick – and he told his family, if she died I must preach the funeral sermon. The child died. But his friends told him, and rightly too, that it would not do to send for me – he being an official in another church – but he must first send for his own pastor to preach the sermon. That was right. Members of church, whether official members or not, should first try to secure services of their own pastor at funerals and weddings – and when they cannot be had, then only send for another minister. But it so happened in this case that the pastor was at synod, and so could not be had, and they sent for me.

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In 1894 he was sentenced to 3 years in prison for securing money under false pretenses in connection with the sale of water filters. A talented writer, he planned to publish a book entitled “From the Pulpit to the Penitentiary” upon the completion of his sentence. He relocated to New Jersey about 1900, but nothing is known about his later life or the fate of his intended book.

The funeral was on Sabbath morning. And when I came to the house, he took me into a separate room and said, "I have been informed that you preached two funeral sermons in our church – and they told you not to go into the pulpit, but stand on the floor. Is that so?" I replied, "Yes, sir, but I preferred it." He then said, "Today I want you to go into the pulpit. And after this when you preach in that church, you stand where you please. I have some say in that church." That day the house was full above and below, and for once I ventured into the pulpit to preach. But things have greatly changed there now. And two new churches have taken the place of the old one, and any orthodox minister would be cheerfully allowed to enter the pulpit to preach a funeral sermon in either of them.<sup>3</sup>

We had a camp meeting in August, but it was not a success – and I think it was the last one ever held on that circuit. During the camp meeting, I was sent for to preach a funeral sermon for an elderly man who died near the Furnace. He had been a drinking man. The sermon was preached in the house, which was quite large. While I was preaching in one part of it, dinner was being prepared in the other. The services over, we were invited to dinner. I ate at the first table, and while the second table was eating I baptized two children in that part of the house in which I had preached.

When ready to start for the place of burial, a gentleman came to me and said, "There is a young lady present who desires to go along to the grave yard, and then to the camp meeting – and wished to know whether she can ride with you, as she is unprovided for and you are alone in your buggy." I replied, "If she is a respectable lady, she is welcome to go with me." He assured me she was very respectable, and brought her to the buggy and introduced her to me. She was a sister of the first child buried by me at the White Deer Church above referred to. She told me she was so glad to have a talk with me. She then said she had been catechized and confirmed as a member of the Reformed Church already referred to, but since the funeral sermon I had preached for her little sister she was not happy – that she had never been "born again" and felt she was not a Christian. "Now," she said, "I would like to become a Christian – but they tell me it is so wrong for me to leave the church, and thus fall away from the faith. Now, what do you think about it?" I replied, "It was a mistake in your joining the church without religion. And it is wrong for you to be a member of the church without religion – as the church cannot save you without religion, and thus to belong to the church is but hypocrisy. You should yield at once to your convictions and become a Christian. But you need not leave the church to do that, and it will but fit you for membership. Stay where you are for the present, but become converted – and then only you are prepared to choose your church home. And if you find you cannot get along in the

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<sup>3</sup> The church in which Dietterich preached was a log building erected jointly by the Lutheran and Reformed congregations in 1819 and enlarged and weatherboarded in 1848. In 1877 the Lutherans ended that relationship and erected their own building across the road, and for many years St. Peter's United Church of Christ and St. John's United Lutheran Church so co-existed in Union County's Kelly township.

church where you now belong, there certainly is no wrong in joining where you can enjoy yourself best. But by all means get religion.”

She took my advice, came to the camp that evening, came forward, and was converted – and remained where she was for a while. But she found very little spiritual food there, could not enjoy herself, left and united with our church and became a most excellent Christian lady. To put catechism in the place of regeneration is a mistake made by many.

At this funeral I became acquainted with the boss of the Furnace,<sup>4</sup> who requested me to preach in their school house in the future. I did so, and it became an established appointment. In a few years the boss became a converted man and united with the church – and he became a very useful member of the same, as he was a man of means and very liberal. He was one of the men who started the work in Milton, where they now have a good church and congregation. So much for one funeral. The Lord be praised.



Union Furnace at Winfield, 1898



Salem Church, 2016

At Salem church,<sup>5</sup> about three miles from Lewisburg, we had an excellent meeting. We had labored there together nearly two weeks without any success. On Thursday, Buck left for his home on another part of the circuit – and where his appointments would be on the following Sabbath. He said I should close the meeting on Friday evening, fill my appointments on Sabbath, and begin a meeting in Hartleton on Sabbath evening – and he would come to my help on Monday. But on Friday evening five penitents came to the altar. I left for my appointments, but promised to return to Salem on Sabbath evening. I filled my appointments on Sabbath, assumed the responsibility of postponing the Hartleton meeting, and returned to Salem Sabbath evening. I preached to a crowded house, and on invitation twenty persons presented themselves at the altar of prayer. Buck came

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<sup>4</sup> The great Union Furnace at Winfield stood just north of the present United Methodist (formerly Evangelical) Church between route 15 and the river. This large plant, capable of making up to 125 tons of iron per week, began operations in 1854 and continued until 1891. The above picture was taken 7 years after the plant closed.

<sup>5</sup> This brick structure, erected in 1849 in East Buffalo township at the northeast corner of Salem Church Road and Pleasant Ridge Road, is one of the oldest Evangelical Association church building still standing. Little changed in outward appearance from the time when Dietterich preached there, the building is now a private home

to the meeting on Monday, approved my course, and the meeting finally closed with thirty-five conversions.

We also had an extensive revival at Orwig's Mill, with some conversions at the different appointments. At Orwig's Mill I preached a funeral sermon for a young Mr. Snyder. He was a soldier and was shot at the second battle of Fredericksburg, by a sharpshooter. He and his brother stood side by side all day in the fight. In the evening they were relieved, fell back, and stacked their guns to take supper. At his request, the younger brother started in search of water to drink – and when he returned with the water he found his brother dead. He was standing in camp, supposed out of danger, engaged in a conversation, when the ball of some sharp shooter penetrated his chest just back of his right elbow, as his arms were hanging by his side, and passed through his chest and dropped into his left boot – where the ball was found. He threw up his arms and exclaimed, "I am shot," fell to the ground and died. His father was a local preacher. The young man's body was not recovered. And I preached a funeral sermon at New Columbia for a Mr. Linn, also a soldier, who died at Washington but was sent home by his comrades for burial.

Thus closed the conference year, for which I received two hundred and seventy-five dollars and fifty-five cents and parsonage free – besides many valuable presents, which began to place me on a better footing financially. Buffalo Valley is a most beautiful and fertile valley, and the people are very social – and all treated us very kindly. But the year is up, and I must go to conference – and what the committee on "Fates" will decide in my case I do not know. They may return me another year, or they may send me elsewhere. But I would like very much to return for one year more.